

Toward A Sustainable Future

Cambridge Growth Policy

UPDATE 2007

LAND USE





A mix of uses in buildings from many eras characterizes Lechmere Square.

Land Use Pattern and Neighborhood Protection

The first four policies of the 1993 document suggest that the diverse pattern of land use in Cambridge should remain fairly constant, especially in established residential neighborhoods and their companion retail districts. Events in the intervening years have reaffirmed the validity of those policies. Residential areas have remained stable, subject mostly to extensive rehabilitation rather than transformation through new construction.

In the fall of 1997, the City Manager appointed a Citywide Growth Management Committee (CGMAC) to address concerns expressed by the community about future density and traffic growth; the need for more housing, including affordable units; and opportunities for public review of large projects. This committee's work included many public discussions concerning the character of existing residential neighborhoods and the land use structure, the scale and density of the city's commercial districts, and the transitions and buffers between differing scales of uses and densities. The culmination of this work was a series of rezoning proposals which increased required open space in each of the city's residential neighborhoods; reduced allowable density in most of the eastern residential neighborhoods; encouraged housing throughout the city by adjusting the allowed floor area ratios to encourage housing over other uses; allowed housing in districts where it was previously prohibited; and established the first citywide traffic and urban design project review for large projects, including those institutional projects on public streets. Their work included a careful analysis of the long-range outcomes of the proposed zoning changes with respect to traffic, housing, and economic impacts. Provisions for transitions between districts in key areas were also addressed through this process.

As the continuation of this work, the rezoning of the commercial areas in the north-eastern portion of the city during the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study in 2000 established a similar structure of adjusted floor area ratios to encourage housing and limit traffic growth, and incentives to increase open space and strengthen existing retail areas and squares. In the same vein, the Concord-Alewife Planning Study proposed similar changes in the Alewife area, and these were adopted by the City Council in 2006.

Consistent with Policy 2, the city's former industrial areas are being encouraged to evolve: at the time of the previous growth policy document, several of the industrial zoning districts (such as IB and IB-2) did not allow residential use. To further the goal of producing more housing, the Citywide Rezoning and the Eastern Cambridge Rezoning made housing allowable citywide and maintained the density allowed for housing in mixed-use districts, while decreasing the allowed density for non-residential projects.

POLICY 1

Existing residential neighborhoods, or any portions of a neighborhood having an identifiable and consistent built character, should be maintained at their prevailing pattern of development and building density and scale.

POLICY 2

Except in evolving industrial areas, the city's existing land use structure and the area of residential and commercial neighborhoods should remain essentially as they have developed historically.

POLICY 3

The wide diversity of development patterns, uses, scales, and densities present within the city's many residential and commercial districts should be retained and strengthened. That diversity should be between and among the various districts, not necessarily within each individual one.

POLICY 4

Adequate transitions and buffers between differing scales of development and differing uses should be provided; general provisions for screening, landscaping and setbacks should be imposed while in especially complex circumstances special transition provisions should be developed.



New and old buildings coexist harmoniously along Bow Street, next to Quincy Square.



The Holmes Trust building brings residential use into the heart of Central Square.

The traditional shopping streets and squares have remained healthy over the past dozen years, aided in part by City initiatives designed to enhance their traditional character:

- the reconstruction and upgrading of the entire public realm in Central Square in 1997;
- streetscape improvements and roadway reconstruction along Cambridge Street from Inman to Lechmere Square in 2003-2005;
- a façade, lighting and signage program initially focused on Central Square and then Cambridge Street, but now active in every commercial district of the city, that has helped many shop owners to upgrade their storefronts to the benefit of the public as well as their own businesses;
- reconstruction of the major Porter Square intersection, greatly expanding plazas and parks at the heart of that Square;
- improvements begun in 2005, two decades long in the planning, to reconstruct the eastern end of Central Square (Lafayette Square) at the entry to University Park with new public plazas and parks emerging soon from the realignment of roadway intersections; and
- upgrades to the public realm in Harvard Square with expanded plazas and pedestrian spaces, currently underway.

Private development has been modest in these traditional commercial districts, as opportunities for major development generally lie elsewhere in the more expansive former industrial areas of the city. But they have not remained static.

Harvard Square, the center of major new construction during the 1980s, enjoyed more modest gains in the 1990s, given a slower pace of large new construction as the number of available sites dwindled. What did occur were smaller, more idiosyncratic projects, often framed around historic preservation, and generally fully in character with the incremental nature of the square's commercial development over its 300-year history:

- Winthrop Square, a combination of housing, retail, and office activities in a variety of new and old buildings;
- 3 Bow Street, where one of the first car garages in the city was transformed into a stylish office and retail complex;
- Zero Arrow Street, where a long vacant lot that blighted its surroundings is now a building with a 300-seat theater and the offices of the Carr Foundation; and finally,
- 90 Mount Auburn Street, the glassy new Harvard Libraries facility that introduces a decidedly modern counterpoint to the brick and clapboard context that surrounds it.

In Central Square, change has been more modest, with a general revival of commercial activity in existing storefronts being the most notable change. However, in 1999, the construction of the seven-story Holmes Trust building with 72 units

of housing and commercial activity on the ground floor transformed the heart of Central Square, giving that important crossroads a new spatial and functional definition.

Massachusetts Avenue north of the Common remains prosperous with only small incremental changes. A series of small housing projects has begun to transform the character of upper Massachusetts Avenue between Porter Square and the Arlington line from an automobile service orientation into a more mixed-use district with residential uses. In the past fourteen years, several dozen units of housing have been constructed or currently are under construction, with dozens more anticipated. At Porter Square, Lesley University has become a major property owner with the acquisition of the Porter Exchange building and associated parcels of land. Ongoing master planning on the part of the University suggests that these real estate assets may be transformed in the years ahead to meet its programming needs.

The importance of the vibrant shopping strip along Massachusetts Avenue north of the Common has become a focus for neighbors. They are concerned about how vulnerable the retail uses might be to change, due to the master planning efforts underway at Lesley University and at the Harvard Law School. The Planning Board has encouraged a dialogue among the affected parties.

Institutional Land Use

Policies 5, 6, and 7 lay out a framework for the City's complex relationship with its major resident institutions in regard to land use. (The broader role of the institutions as citizens of the City will be discussed in the chapter on institutional policies.) As developers in the community, they continue to play an important role, generally in a manner faithful to these three policies.

Given rising endowments and donations during the 1990s, the institutions were active builders in the decade. Consistent with these policies and other policies in *Toward a Sustainable Future*, housing for students and affiliates was a significant component of both Harvard and MIT development activity. Academic construction, fueled by new spheres of inquiry that require specialized or state-of-the-art facilities, was also prominent.

In making zoning adjustments citywide in 2001, the City chose not to alter the density standards of the two university campuses in order to permit continued appropriate construction at those core locations. In that vein, throughout the decade Harvard expanded and modernized its science and other facilities on the North Yard, infilling among older buildings or in some instances replacing them. Some of the initiatives:

- the Naito Chemistry Building and Life Sciences Building;
- a new vivarium located substantially underground in the courtyard of the biology building on Divinity Avenue;

POLICY 5

The major institutions, principally Lesley College, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the hospitals, should be limited to those areas that historically have been occupied by such uses and to abutting areas that are reasonably suited to institutional expansion, as indicated by any institutional overlay district formally adopted by the City.

POLICY 6

For such institutions reasonable densities should be permitted in their core campuses to forestall unnecessary expansion into both commercial districts and low density residential neighborhoods.



The CGIS building, on the north side of Cambridge Street, is set between an older wood frame structure and the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

POLICY 7

Notwithstanding the limitations implied in the above policy statements, (1) the establishment of a new center of tax exempt, institutional activity may be appropriate in one or more of the city's evolving industrial areas and/or (2) the development of a modest and discreet institutional presence may be appropriate in any nonresidential district when a combination of two or more of the following benefits accrue to the city:

1. Such action will permanently forestall excessive development at the core campus of an existing institution, in particularly sensitive locations; or
2. Existing institutional activity in a core campus area will be reduced or eliminated, particularly at locations where conflict with existing residential communities has been evident or is possible in the future; and
3. The potential for future commercial, tax paying development is not significantly reduced; or
4. The presence of a stable, well managed institutional activity could encourage, stimulate, and attract increased investment in non institutional commercial tax producing development.



The Brain & Cognitive Sciences building is at the interface between the MIT campus and the high technology center at Kendall Square.

- the CGIS buildings on two sites on Cambridge Street replacing the older structures that had been there;
- the Northwest Science Center atop a 700-car, four-story underground parking garage, replacing the surface parking facility that long dominated the Hammond Street edge of the campus;
- the Maxwell Dworkin Building on Oxford Street, and Hauser Hall on the Law School Campus;
- the Information Services Building at Hammond Street; and
- the LISE Science Building on Oxford Street.

After a long planning process with the City and affected neighbors, the University has received zoning and special permit approval for the construction of approximately 500 beds of new housing, in a variety of styles, on sites at Banks and Cowperthwaite Streets and on the former Mahoney's Garden Center site in Riverside, venues long held by the University in reserve for housing or other academic uses. As part of the agreement, Harvard has agreed to construct 33 units of affordable housing in the Switch House building on Blackstone Street and 18 units in three townhouse style buildings on Riverside Place. Finally, Harvard will provide a new community park at the corner of Western Avenue and Memorial Drive.

To address a long-standing need to provide affordable housing ownership options to junior faculty and staff, the University purchased a townhouse development of 180 units on Putnam Avenue and Pleasant Street in Cambridgeport.

The University has also become involved in the planning for a major campus expansion—envisioned as a mix of academic, cultural, housing, and commercial uses—on newly acquired land on the southern side of the Charles River in Allston. The University's planning focus on this new frontier suggests that the physical limits are being approached for expansion at its historic locus in Harvard Square.

MIT, less constrained by an immediate residential context, also had a very active decade of construction. Noteworthy new academic buildings have come to dominate the East Campus—the Stata Center and the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences, McGovern Institute for Brain Research, & Picower Institute for Learning and Memory—transforming their portion of Main and Vassar Streets from an architecturally undistinguished area into a dramatic entry to the campus, and helping to complete the transformation of Kendall Square anticipated more than forty years ago. In addition, the Zesiger Sports & Fitness Center was added across from the Kresge Auditorium on the main campus.

Like Harvard, the Institute has also expanded its affiliate housing supply, centered in the West Campus and the adjacent portions of the Lower Cambridgeport industrial district. Simmons Hall on Vassar Street provides new undergraduate housing, and the dorm at 70 Pacific Street in Cambridgeport provides units for graduate students. These new structures join dormitory space created in old industrial buildings along Albany Street in a growing university residential precinct, long anticipated at the west end of the campus. Unlike Harvard, much space remains to be filled

within the Institute's core campus, with physical limits on the main campus and adjacent areas not a significant concern for the foreseeable future.

All three of Cambridge's major institutions have been expanding in a more subtle way, one that is always of concern to the City and that bears careful monitoring: acquisition of existing private facilities for conversion to academic use, for investment, or to be held in reserve for some undetermined future use. The 1.6 million square foot office and retail complex at Technology Square was acquired by MIT, where in addition to private commercial tenants, MIT has had a long-standing presence. The Institute now has put the complex up for sale while likely retaining land and other equity interests.

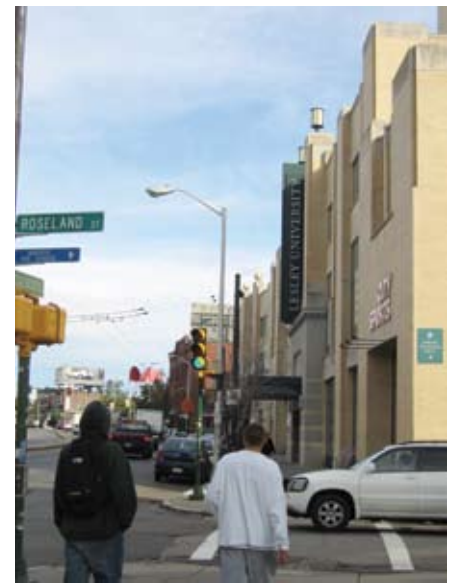
Lesley University has acquired the Porter Exchange building as the initial phase of a new North Campus to house, among other activities, the Art Institute of Boston, which is now merged with Lesley. Harvard University has acquired University Place, among other properties in Harvard Square, as well as leasing numerous other properties in the Square. Aside from the long-term issues of tax obligations, such sites are frequently the location of commercial and retail activities that provide vital services to the abutting community and provide an animating presence on public streets. Conversion to academic use can have significant impact on the vitality of nearby shopping districts.

Evolving Industrial Areas

The evolution of the city's old industrial areas is perhaps the key land use story of the past fifteen years. Policies 8, 9, 10, and 11 suggest that it was in these areas—North Point/East Cambridge Riverfront/Kendall Square, Upper and Lower Cambridgeport Industrial District, the Alewife Quadrangle and Triangle—that an important new pattern of mixed-use development would be established. Generally freer from the constraints of nearby residential neighbors, lacking a pervasive historic context requiring preservation, and frequently close to public transit or to the vehicular entries into the city from the suburbs, these extensive districts would help both to meet new business and housing demands, as well as to harness the income potential of development that could financially support City services. The future articulated in those policy statements has substantially come to pass.

The past fifteen years have led to completion of the East Cambridge Riverfront with housing, retail, and office uses in a set of buildings that almost perfectly matches the urban design committed to paper in 1978. The ambitious plan at University Park in Cambridgeport, also illustrated in a series of detailed urban design plans in 1983, is now fully built out, with a large component of housing only hoped for in the plan. The completion of the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Plan is near, including a significant component of housing expected to be built in a 20 story residential tower, bringing a long development process to a positive end.

As those development areas in the eastern part of Cambridge neared completion after years of intense planning and public investment, peripheral development sites



Lesley University is strengthening its presence in Porter Square.

POLICY 8

The availability of transit services should be a major determinant of the scale of development and the mix of uses encouraged and permitted in the predominantly nonresidential districts of the city: the highest density commercial uses are best located where transit service is most extensive (rapid transit and trolley); much reduced commercial densities and an increased proportion of housing use are appropriate where dependence on the automobile is greatest; mixed uses, including retail activities in industrial and office districts, should be considered to reduce the need to use the automobile during working hours. Similarly, the scale, frequency, mode and character of goods delivery should play an important role in determining the appropriate density of nonresidential uses anywhere in the city.

POLICY 9

The evolution of the city's industrial areas should be encouraged, under the guidance of specific urban design plans, and through other public policy and regulations such that:

1. Those areas can adapt to new commercial and industrial patterns of development;
2. The residential neighborhood edges abutting such areas are strengthened through selective residential reuse within the development areas or through careful transition in density, scale and lot development pattern;
3. New uses and varied scales and densities can be introduced into such areas;
4. Uses incompatible with the city's existing and future desired development pattern are phased out.

POLICY 10

In some evolving industrial areas multiple uses should be encouraged, including an important component of residential use in suitable locations not subject to conflict with desired industrial uses, to advance other development policy objectives of the city:

1. To provide opportunities for those who work in the city to live here;
2. To limit the use of the automobile to get to Cambridge and to travel within Cambridge;
3. To encourage more active use of all parts of the city for longer periods throughout the day; and
4. To limit the secondary impacts of new development on the existing, established neighborhoods. These impacts may be both economic, as in the increased demand placed on the limited stock of existing housing, and environmental, as in the increase in traffic on neighborhood streets.

POLICY 11

A wide range of development patterns should be encouraged in these evolving industrial areas at scales and densities and in forms which would be difficult to accommodate in the city's fully developed districts and neighborhoods.

have become active, given that a new future has been firmly charted in those once languishing industrial areas. Cambridge Research Park, just outside the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority's Kendall Square, is now transforming a former brown-fields site into a mixed-use center with 300 units of housing now occupied, two major office and research facilities completed, a new network of streets and open spaces connecting to the rest of the city, with other research and development buildings, housing, and theater facilities to come.

The planning leading up to the comprehensive Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition provided the regulatory context for the approval of more than 500 units of housing, which has started construction across the street at 303 Third Street, on another former electric utility site. For decades a sea of parking and storage for utility equipment and supplies, Cambridge Research Park and 303 Third Street will soon be integrated into the vital new mixed-use center in Eastern Cambridge, where thousands of people, including the nearby students at MIT, will live, work, and find recreation.

On the other side of Kendall Square, Technology Square (itself a pioneering redevelopment effort in the 1960s) on Main Street and One Kendall Square (an early private industrial reuse effort in the 1980s) on Hampshire Street each expanded with new office and research and development space, as technology firms like Amgen, Novartis, and Schlumberger sought a place at one of the epicenters of innovation in America.

Perhaps the most dramatic turn of events is the beginning redevelopment of the abandoned rail yards at North Point, a process that will unfold over the next twenty years. Through the combination of effective planning by the City, commitment to a vision by developers, and a strong effort by the Planning Board, the community, and City staff throughout an extensive public review process, a community of nearly 3,000 dwelling units and some 2.2 million of square feet of office, research and retail space has begun to be constructed. With the guidance of a master plan that will create about two miles of new roads, ten acres of large and small public parks, a relocated and enhanced Lechmere Station on the Green Line, and access to the Community College Station on the Orange Line, North Point will be a place to live and work for thousands of people. The intent is for North Point to become a destination for many in the region seeking to enjoy the last link of parkland along the Charles River now emerging along the waterfront of North Point after more than a decade of planning.

As the year 2005 drew to a close, the City had concluded a planning effort to identify the desired future for the Concord-Alewife Area, 180 acres with potential for significant future development, although constrained by unique environmental and traffic circumstances. As other former industrial areas are built out, Alewife can be expected to be the object of increased development interest, already suggested in the several office buildings constructed along Cambridgepark Drive in the 1980s and 1990s, and the 300-unit apartment building that opened there in 2001.

The Concord-Alewife zoning and land use plan aims to create a transit-oriented neighborhood with a mix of uses throughout the area, including housing, office/R&D, industry, retail, possible City uses, and open space. It would reconfigure density to respond to transit proximity, provide for greater public review of development in the area, and introduce open space and permeability standards and guidelines for low-impact development that will manage stormwater on-site.

The plan calls for appropriate transitions between the Cambridge Highlands residential neighborhood and the higher density mix of uses permitted in the Quadrangle, and introduces design guidelines to create a sense of place and an active public realm. It recommends overcoming barriers and creating connections needed to create a walkable neighborhood, improving access to transit, and enhancing the environment. The proposal was adopted by the Council in June 2006.

Pace of Development and Limits to Total Development

Policy 13 suggested how to manage the pace of development in Cambridge without establishing arbitrary, numerical markers. Those inevitably fail to reflect the subtle changes in the context for new development, fail to reconcile easily with other community objectives (such as jobs, tax revenue, and repair of damaged landscapes), and lack the flexibility to respond to changing market forces.

In the fourteen years since publication of *Toward a Sustainable Future*, a wave of new construction brought some 4000 new dwelling units in about 4 million square

POLICY 12

Those necessary or desirable uses and activities which require specially tailored environments should be provided for and those uses, activities and development patterns which create distinctive environments that serve as amenities for the whole community should be protected or maintained.

For example: low rent industrial space for start up enterprises; locations for industrial use and development which could be compromised by proximity to other, incompatible, uses, including residential uses; small commercial enclaves which directly serve their immediate surrounding residential neighborhood; locations appropriate for gas stations, car repair facilities, tow yards, etc.; structures or clusters of structures eligible for local historic district designation; or for designation as a local conservation district; environments as frequently found in the Residence "A" districts, where a unique combination of distinctive architecture and landscaped open space prevails; areas designated or eligible as national register historic districts.



This perspective suggests the image for the central park in the North Point development, which received a PUD Special Permit from the Planning Board in 2003. Full build-out for the project could take twenty years.

POLICY 13

A pace of development or redevelopment should be encouraged that permits the maintenance of a healthy tax base, allows for adjustment and adaptation to changing economic conditions, and is consistent with the City's urban design and other physical development objectives yet does not unreasonably disrupt the daily activities of the city's neighborhoods and residents or overburden the city's water and sewer infrastructure.

feet of development, and approximately 6.75 million square feet of non-residential development. In managing this major change, the City has had the advantage of an improved public review process that has allowed more careful monitoring of new development and more effective mitigation of its impacts. In particular, the Project Review Special Permit and the Parking and the Transportation Demand Management processes have helped the City evaluate additional development. These procedures more systematically identify ways to reduce and mitigate traffic impacts, to improve building and site design, and, in many other subtle ways, to accommodate more development with less impact than was the case in years past.